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Cancellations Librarian

by Joe K. Stephens
State of Oregon Law Library

*I*n describing what led to him to create this position description Mr. Stephens writes: "... it was in a very dark time for this library. Our funding had been level for three biennia, and this was during a period when many American legal publishers were being bought out by the Canadian Thomson Corp. When Thomson acquired a publisher, prices for their publications escalated rapidly. In 1996, Thomson acquired the premier American legal publisher, West Publishing Co., and there was despair in Law Library Land, since West publications are practically indispensable in law libraries. It was clear that our only recourse was canceling some of what we received, and the question became what to cancel. To make those decisions, we required the expertise of a *Cancellations Librarian*. I think I wrote the ad in about ten minutes."

To read Mr. Stephen's more serious treatment of the subject, see:

The Merger: What will it Cost Law Libraries? which appeared in *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, V. 17, 13-23 (1999).

Cancellations Librarian (the advertisement)

The Oregon Supreme Court Library anticipates a vacancy for an experienced Cancellations Librarian. This position is contingent on the early retirement of our Acquisitions Librarian, who no longer has anything to do, but is temperamentally unsuited to cancellations work.

Qualifications: JD and MLS from accredited institutions; three years experience in a shrinking library. Ten years experience in debt collection or repossession work may be substituted for the academic degrees. Must be able to deal with vendors who refuse to acknowledge that it is possible to cancel their products and who therefore have no cancellation procedures

in place, as well as customer service employees who are recent immigrants from other planets. Position requires excellent communications skill, such as the ability to curse in several languages, as well as the ability to carry on in the midst of pointless change and demoralization of staff. Ruthlessness and irascibility are desirable traits. Must have no sentimental attachments to books or history. Indifference to the legal information needs of judges, lawyers, and the public at large a plus.

The Cancellations Librarian will write and implement a new Collection Destruction policy. It is imperative that the unorganized destruction of the recent past be replaced with systematic destruction procedures as we move into the 21st century.

Salary commensurate with qualifications, experience, and amounts cancelled. Excellent benefits package includes psychiatric counseling and outplacement when the library is destroyed.

The Applicant

Dear Mr. Stephens,

I wanted to get my application off to you the instant I saw the notice of the fantastic opportunity you are offering a person of my particular skills.

First let me point out that I consider this field a calling rooted deep in my blood. One of my ancestors was the Papyrus Cataloguer at the Library at Alexandria. (Not really a good position for an absent minded chain smoker.) Another sorted books for Savonarola. (He sorted them into two piles: Burn and Burn Along with Author.) Another, my Great-great-grandfather Dewey Ryan, developed the first scientific methodology for deaccessing a collection 10 percent at a time. This was, of course, the famous Dewey Decimation System.

My own experience to date has not been nearly so lofty. I have been associated



with a number of large libraries, which were forced to downsize, having formerly occupied one large facility with several wings. I was responsible for pulling the wings off. I also had a brief stint as the Client/Collection Interface Librarian at the library at the University of Southern Labrador. Clients would ask me to retrieve a particular book from the closed stacks and I would tell them not to be so particular and to please go away. I was the Labrador Non-retriever. Finally, I recently completed a doctoral dissertation titled: *Computer Cataloguing for the 21st Century: Infinite Possibilities for Misfiling*. I would gladly send you a copy but, unfortunately, I don't seem to be able to locate one.

All in all, I believe I am just what you are looking for in the way of a Cancellations Librarian. I do hope you will be in touch. I can be reached here or through my web site at:

<http://www.librarybooks.wedon'tneednostinkinlibrarybooks.com>.

Very truly yours,

Robert S. Ryan


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The Cancellation Librarian position announcement, originally posted to a law librarian discussion list in 1997, has been reprinted in numerous law library newsletters and in a slightly altered form in the AALL Spectrum Job Announcement: Cancellations Librarian (11/97:32).

"A keen sense of humor helps us overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected, and outlast the unbearable."

Dr. William A. Ward

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